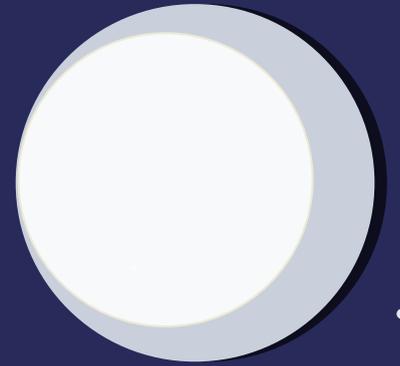


N O R T H W E S T E R N M I C H I G A N C O L L E G E

WHITE PINE PRESS

We hew to the line; let the chips fall where they may.

Virtual Stargazing



NMC Astronomer Jerry Dobek Shares the Night Sky Page 4



Illustration by Martha Sprout

News in Brief

Michael Estes has resigned from NMC's Board of Trustees. He stepped down Oct. 17 and did not cite any reason for his resignation. Michigan law requires the Board to appoint a replacement trustee within 30 days, who will fill the term until the next regular community college election. That election is in November 2022. Registered voters of Grand Traverse County are eligible to apply for the vacancy.

NMC's Great Lakes Culinary Institute (GLCI) has been named the 2022 Best in the Midwest culinary school by Intelligent.com, a resource for online/on-campus program rankings and higher education planning. Researchers compared 126 programs from 65 universities and colleges across the United States. GLCI was previously ranked No. 11 culinary schools nationwide by bestchoiceschools.com, and No. 9 among culinary schools by bestvalueschools.com. Find out more about the program at nmc.edu/culinary or watch a video.

A monitoring buoy has been placed on East Grand Traverse Bay for the first time. The NMC-Michigan Technological University collaboration placed three this fall in the bay: one near East Bay Park in East Bay, one near Greilickville in West Bay, and one near North Manitou Island in Lake Michigan. They were paid for with a grant from the Great Lakes Observing System. "We have never had any measurements in East Grand Traverse Bay previously, and having three strategically placed allows comparative understanding of the three separate but connected water bodies," said Hans Van Sumeren, director of NMC's Great Lakes Water Studies Institute.

The NMC Board of Trustees has rated President Nick Nissley as "very effective". He earned this rating for his initiating the strategic planning process, leading the college through a pandemic, and strengthening connections with the community and college stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, the board instructs the Presidential Performance and Compensation Committee (PPC) to negotiate an extension of his two-year contract. As we move beyond the initial onboarding years and pandemic crisis, the board would like an expanded list of expectations, goals and a revised review process. The PPC will bring back recommendations accordingly.

NORTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

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NMC in History

The NMC Clock Tower was completed in 1984. Originally estimated to cost \$30,000, a contribution of \$20,000 from Les Biederman allowed the project to be completed. The clock quickly became the focal point of the campus. It was known for two distinct qualities: the loud bell said to knock passers-by over and the clock faces themselves—which typically told four different times!

Photo Credit: NMC Archives, *Northwestern Michigan College: The Second Twenty Years*.

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These photos from space were taken from a live video feed.

Photo Courtesy of Jerry Dobek

Innovation Allows NMC to Share the Night Sky

Kathryn DePauw
Editor in Chief

An interesting setup, that merges analog and digital technologies, has allowed the Joseph H. Rogers Observatory to share live video from its telescopes to the world. Dr. Jerry Dobek, astronomy instructor, astronomy department head, and science department head, spent the summer of 2020 solving the unique problem of how to create safe access to the telescope during a global pandemic.

When COVID-19 restrictions shut down campuses around the world, most astronomy instruction turned to photographs as reference materials. These images are often color enhanced or taken with equipment like the Hubble telescope, that don't have to contend with Earth's atmosphere. That didn't sit well with Dobek, who took it upon himself to see if he could find a solution and create a more authentic experience for students..

"I want to give them the experience, that this is what you actually see when looking through the telescope," said Dobek. "That's the beauty part."

It also allows the viewer to appreciate the relationship they have with the night sky, according to Dobek. Details like the wavering of the video feed from atmospheric disturbance and the actual size and color of the object are representative of what someone would see looking through a telescope at home. "It's important to me, as a teacher, to provide 'realistic' perspectives," he said.

Prior to COVID-19, Dobek tried for years to use video cameras to record off of the telescope, but there was a problem—cameras require light. Something that is in short supply at night.

A computer chip, developed by Sony and intended for security cameras, that can record in almost complete darkness was the answer to the problem. They allow cameras to see in almost complete darkness. Revolution Imager put that chip into an adapter that can fit inside a telescope's lens.

This setup allows for adjustable exposure, which determines how bright the image is. It does this by letting the user control how long the camera lets in light for. This adapter has a very wide exposure range: 1/10,000 of a second to 5 1/8 of a second. Bright objects, like the moon, only need a very short exposure time to capture an image, while darker (or further) objects may require the maximum exposure length to take in more light and make the object visible.

These images are then stored in the adapter, can be enhanced, and "played" in sequence, creating a nearly-live video stream of the night sky on its small display screen.

Like many of the science classes requiring labs, Dobek's courses have been virtual whenever possible since COVID-19 hit, and the number of students per lab class cut in half. He knew that being able to project the telescope's images down into the lower classroom in the observatory would

make teaching that much easier, and safer, for everyone.

The telescope adapter produces analog video, which degrades when sent over long distances. With the classroom more than 65 feet away, another solution had to be found. Dobek knew of old video amplifiers that were used on campus years ago. With the help of NMC's Educational Media Technologies department, some of these amplifiers were found and installed.

Once the observatory's digital planetary camera, which is great for bright objects, but not good for dark-sky observation, was hooked up, all these wires create a "spiderweb" in the observatory, not a problem while campus access was limited.

Traditionally in Dobek's Observational Astronomy class, he tries to explain what students are seeing through the eyepiece of the telescope as they listen and, one-by-one, take turns looking and drawing what they see. This past summer, despite COVID-19 restrictions being lifted, he included the video streaming in the class. "Even though they don't have the thrill of looking through the telescope. It was a way that they are still looking through the telescope, it just happens to be 65 feet away."

This allowed students to directly compare their drawings to the real image. "I can walk up to the screen, I can point to these objects, so now I can do more explanation there," said Dobek. "It's a deeper, more enhanced experience."

(cont. pg.4)

NMC Students Maintain Tradition of Giving

Kathryn DePauw
Editor in Chief

NMC Professional Communications students are working to provide Thanksgiving meals to local families with the eighth annual Food for Thought "Thanks-For-Giving" Project. Students will use their communication skills to raise funds for the Thanksgiving meal boxes and reach their goal of feeding more than 125 families.

This program has a special place within the community. "I cannot imagine teaching this course any other way," said Kristy McDonald, business instructor and faculty contact for the project. "Real world lessons are so important and not only does it teach communication but it instills a sense of community engagement."

This year has worked a little differently, but student's have worked hard to find socially distanced solutions. This separation from the community hasn't slowed down the project. "[The students] are amazing and excited," said McDonald. "They are working extremely hard and have put in a lot of energy, heart and learning!"

To Apply for a Meal

Any NMC students, full or part time, can apply to receive a Thanksgiving meal box. The box will include a turkey and traditional side dishes for a family of six. The program also offers special small surprises for any children in the family. The applications are first come, first serve and the NMC Food Pantry will select the recipients. An additional 50 meals will be distributed by the nonprofit Big Brothers Big Sisters. They are currently planning on donating 75 meals to NMC families, but that may change if donations exceed the current goal. "They have thought about more meals, donating to the NMC Pantry or adding something else to each meal box," said McDonald. All meals will be distributed on Monday, Nov. 22.

To Donate to the Program

Students are asking the NMC community to donate 125 bags of mini marshmallows and 125 cans of cranberry sauce.



Photo Courtesy of NMC's Food ForThought's Facebook Page

Nick Nissley and the professional Communication students working on the Food For Thought project.

Red collection bins will be located on the main campus at the Innovation Center, Osterlin Student Success Center, and at Parsons-Stulen on the Aeropark Campus.

Cash donations are also being accepted, with a private donor matching contributions up to \$5,000. Cash donors can win a two-night stay at the Great Wolf Lodge if they donate \$10 or more at nmc.edu/give. When giving, follow the steps below.

- Select the amount to give.
- Designate gift to "other."
- Manually enter "Food For Thought Thanksgiving Project."

To enter the contest, donation receipts must be forwarded to Cam Walker walke299@mail.nmc.edu.

Night Sky (cont.)

In order to go one step further and translate the analog image to digital, and share with the world, another technological relic was given new life. Adapters meant to convert old analog camcorder VHS tapes into digital DVDs were used to allow a modern laptop to show the live video stream, which could then be shared in a virtual meeting.

This has allowed the observatory, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last month, to begin offering public viewing nights again. The most recent event, on Sept. 25, was with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the Grand Traverse Astronomical Society (GTAS) in honor of the National Lakeshore's 50th anniversary. Viewers were able to see the moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies while Dobek (current president of GTAS) and other members answered questions from the public.

"There is always an awe of excitement when someone looks through a telescope at say Saturn, or even more so, the Moon. Gazing at these wonders in our universe, inevitably you will become curious (as all you Earthlings are), and ask questions. That's when I "gotcha". We learn by asking questions. And when someone asks a question, then I can teach them what science is: It's asking questions—and working to find an answer. Which often leads to more questions.

The use of this video camera has allowed me to share that excitement and promote the curiosity of science to more than just the NMC students, more than just the local community—now I'm sharing and educating world-wide. From one small dome in Traverse City, Michigan."

And it seems that people are eager for such an opportunity. The two-hour event attracted more than 450 visitors from

around the world.

"It's great, because it is 3:30 in the morning in Hilo, Hawaii and I'm looking at Saturn through a telescope, a third of the way around the Earth, and it's a real live image," one viewer said.

One visitor found the footage so unbelievable, he claimed it must be a recording. "I tapped the mount of the telescope, and the image started bouncing all over the place," Dobek said. "It blew people's minds."

Dobek received an email from an older couple after the event. The wife is disabled and has never been able to visit the observatory's telescope due to the narrow winding staircase. They were overjoyed to finally be able to "experience" the observatory and participate in a public viewing event.

Earlier this year, in preparation for in-person public viewing nights returning, and in order to better accommodate social distancing and general safety concerns during COVID, Dobek suggested moving the video streaming setup to the dome behind the observatory. From here, he would video stream from the dome's 14-inch telescope into the classroom for public viewing. The larger telescope up in the observatory would be used for live viewing.

In order to make this work, he needed to move equipment and run internet and data cables from the dome to the main building. Total cost for the upgrades was only \$850 and, within days of the request, an anonymous donation was made to the NMC Foundation to "enhance the visualization" for astronomy students. NMC installed the cables this summer.

The next public viewing night is planned for November 5, but is limited by the weather. Anyone interested in

participating should visit the GTAS website at www.gtaastro.org for information and a link to the event. The group is currently only hosting virtual events, but may revisit the issue come spring.

Currently, Dobek believes this may be the only virtual live streaming program of its kind. He believes that his innovation could be used in other observatories and schools to improve access to students and the public. "I am working on an article for a science journal that explains what I'm using and more importantly 'how' to use this in teaching and sharing the objects in the night sky," he said. "More should be able to do what I'm doing. They just need to know how and what it takes to make it happen."

Photos taken from the video feed by Jerry Dobek



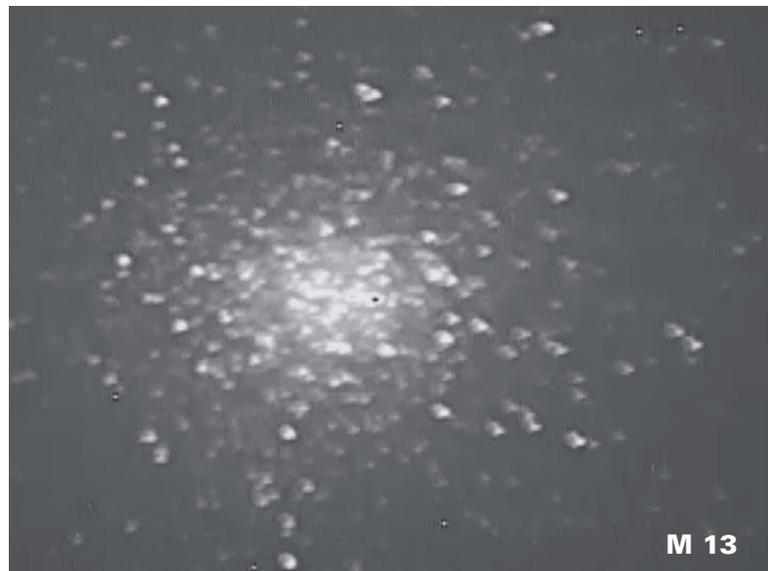
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White Pine Press is Hiring

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Local Soccer Match Brings Controversy

Kyle Hoffman Kingsley's varsity soccer team wrapped their season with a 0-8 loss to Staff Writer Grayling on October 13. The Stags finished their season 0-17. The team scored only 7 goals all season, compared to 147 goals scored by their opponents. Netting 140 fewer goals than were scored against you in a winless season seems like a tough road.

Unfortunately, that was not all. Kingsley's September 29 match against the conference-rival Benzie Central Huskies featured a 16-goal, national record-setting performance from Kevin Hubbell that ended with a 0-17 loss for the Stags. The game concluded prematurely at the end of the first half due to the mercy rule. (Michigan High School Athletic Association ruling states that a game must be ended if the goal differential is 8 or more after the first half.) Benzie Central head coach Chris Batchelder faced scathing criticism from the community for how he managed the situation.

Some consider the winning coach's decision to keep his foot on the pedal during a blowout a classless move of poor sportsmanship.

"If high school sports degenerates into 'Let's try to hang the most points we can' and taking advantage of people when they're down, we're really missing the mark and need to reevaluate why we're doing this," Keith Smith, superintendent of Kingsley Schools told the *Traverse City Record-Eagle*. Others feel that congratulations to record-setter Hubbell are in order and that he and the coach absolutely should have seized the opportunity in front of them. "Everyone wants to shatter records," said a writer from Barstool Sports, a digital media company that focuses on sports and pop culture. "So, I applaud Kevin Hubbell."

Most of the Stags' matches this year ended in mercy rules, but none had exceeded a 10-goal deficit. The previous state record for most goals in a game from a single player was 10 goals, set in 2003; the national record was 14 goals, set in 1980. It takes a generational talent to shatter a national record that stood for more than 40 years. Hubbell's performance inevitably attracted scouts from universities across the country.

"At the beginning of the season, I had one goal in mind, to break at least one record," Hubbell told the *Record-Eagle's* "The Get Around" podcast. After scoring 8 goals in the first 10 minutes of the game against Kingsley, a national record was in sight. "My coach looked at me and said, 'the national record is 14,'" Hubbell said. "I just went for it."

Hubbell was subbed out of the game periodically, but the team only had one extra player available. The situation was complicated, and ultimately, polarizing. There is not a rulebook that can determine what actions are and are not unsportsmanlike.

Kingsley's Board of Education addressed the issue in their October meeting. Board members agreed that a letter expressing disapproval of what happened during the September 29th game addressed to the Benzie Central Board of Education would be an adequate start, but some expressed that it was not enough. "If we could do it, I'd fire that coach so fast it would make his head spin," said Kingsley School Board trustee Mike Schueller at the Kingsley Board of Education meeting.

The aftermath of this game was covered by numerous national media outlets, from ABC News to The Hill. While the Kingsley Board of Education supported its soccer team and players, others lambasted them. The Barstool Sports article's headline read: "A Loser High School In Michigan Is Crying And Protesting A Game Over 'Sportsmanship' Because A Player Scored 16 Goals Against Them."

As if the string of tough losses were not enough, Kingsley's players could not escape the noise.

"It was really hard to go to school with a kid talking to you about the game," senior and captain Sam Belanger told the *White Pine Press*. The lack of support was not new. "My freshman year we had good support from the student body, but then it died out after a while to pretty much just parents showing up to the games," Belanger said. He is not alone. William Pelloski,



Sam Belanger, captain of the team shown, playing for Kingsley Senior High.

a varsity soccer player and sophomore at Kingsley, told the *Record-Eagle* that bullying about the soccer team has gone on since middle school.

The blowout loss against Benzie Central only exacerbated the harassment. "[The game] made us realize how far people would take things to kind of bully us players," Belanger said. "At the homecoming parade around the football field the soccer team was meant to go first, and we could hear football players in the back saying, 'Why are they going first? They suck.'"

The Kingsley varsity football team recently lost their final regular-season game, finishing with an 8-1 record. Thousands of people attended that game, likely more than every Kingsley soccer game combined. The Kingsley community has the capability to rally behind their soccer team, but it's unclear if that will happen in the near future.

"There is a future there, but we need to build up the youth program and get more students excited about soccer," Belanger said.

It is open to interpretation whether Benzie Central's actions in the game against Kingsley were unsportsmanlike but bullying that comes after a record-setting and demoralizing loss will not help build up the youth program and get local students excited about soccer.

It is important to keep in mind the purpose of organized high school sports. Fourteen to 18-year-old students learn how to work as a team, communicate, be accountable, respect others, win, lose, and—along with countless other lessons—have fun.

A near-impossible feat leaves Kevin Hubbell and Benzie Central with an immense sense of pride and accomplishment but leaves a beaten-down Kingsley team demoralized.

"I think we learned how to be disciplined by staying in the game," Belanger said. "But I think we also learned that nobody has ever liked Kingsley soccer."

Although many players ended their high school soccer careers on a sour note, the Kingsley Board of Education plans to revisit the issue and officially recognize the team's relentless effort in their upcoming Nov. 8 meeting.



Steve Drake Makes History With 50 Years at NMC



A sketch (artist unknown) of the Science and Math department faculty. 1978.

Rachel Bonesteel

Staff Writer

This fall, Northwestern Michigan College's Steve Drake is celebrating 50 years of teaching a variety of Mathematical courses right here in Traverse City. Drake began teaching in 1971 after interviewing for five other jobs all, varying in salary. "My wife and I were overseas and I got a grant to go to the University of Michigan," said Drake. "My grant ran out and I needed a job. I told my wife she better find me one. She found me six jobs and NMC was the only one I felt I fit in with. They had serious teachers there. Working with the faculty was the main reason I went to NMC. They didn't want to just play games."

Prior to NMC, Drake lived overseas with a job in the Department of Defense. He acquired this job after attending Northwest Missouri State University, where he earned a Bachelors of Science in Mathematics and another in biology. He then earned a Master's Degree at the University of Wyoming in science with a concentration on mathematics and nuclear physics.

The project he is most proud of was his first with the National

the loss of the chalkboard.

"COVID meant online and livestream classes, so I had to do a lot of things differently. But I couldn't compare the [math] problems (side-by-side) like I used to on the chalkboard. I even enjoyed the livestream despite that." Even with virtual barriers Drake's love of teaching and care for his students is prevalent.

Drake has earned many awards and recognitions during his long career. One of his most notable is the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) in 2004. This award is given to individuals who go above and beyond on their campus. He also earned the 2018 Imogene Wise Faculty award that aims to recognize teachers who achieve excellent dedication and innovation in the classroom, as chosen by a student committee.

In his free time, Drake enjoys spending time with his wife and grandson. They often go on walks and explore Traverse City. When asked if plans to retire were in the works, Drake said, "I'm too old to retire. Now I don't have any great desire to."

Science Foundation in the 1960s. This was during the space race and Drake was enthusiastic to be a student amidst it all. "I studied nuclear physics. The University of Wyoming was a major research center for the government and I had to go through clearances. I went to missile silos and things."

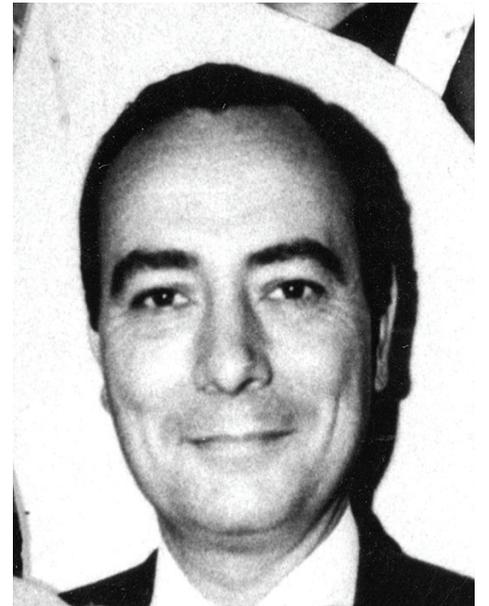
Drake, after decades of teaching, has cemented his math instruction philosophy. "I've always believed there's no point in learning math if you don't know how to use it. I taught that from the beginning till now," Drake said.

He also feels mathematics isn't just for the classroom and those going for a math-related degree. "I think everyone needs some mathematical processes. Not just algebra, everyone needs to be able to recognize patterns and structures."

COVID-19 changed not just the way students were learning and interacting, but how teachers taught and interacted with their students as well. Drake said his main challenge during this pandemic has involved



Steve Drake in 2018.



Steve Drake in the early 1970s.

Celebrating 22 Years and 30 Artists with the Annual Holiday Artist Market

Craig Hadley

Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Dennon Museum

What: The 22nd Annual Holiday Artist Market

When: November 5-7, 11am – 4pm

(check shop.dennosmuseum.org for the latest updates)

Where: Dennon Museum Center, 1410 College Drive, Traverse City, MI 49686

Why: Annual fundraiser for the Dennon Museum Center and an opportunity to shop local for the holidays!

Worried about supply chain shortages and whether or not gifts will arrive on time? We are thrilled to announce

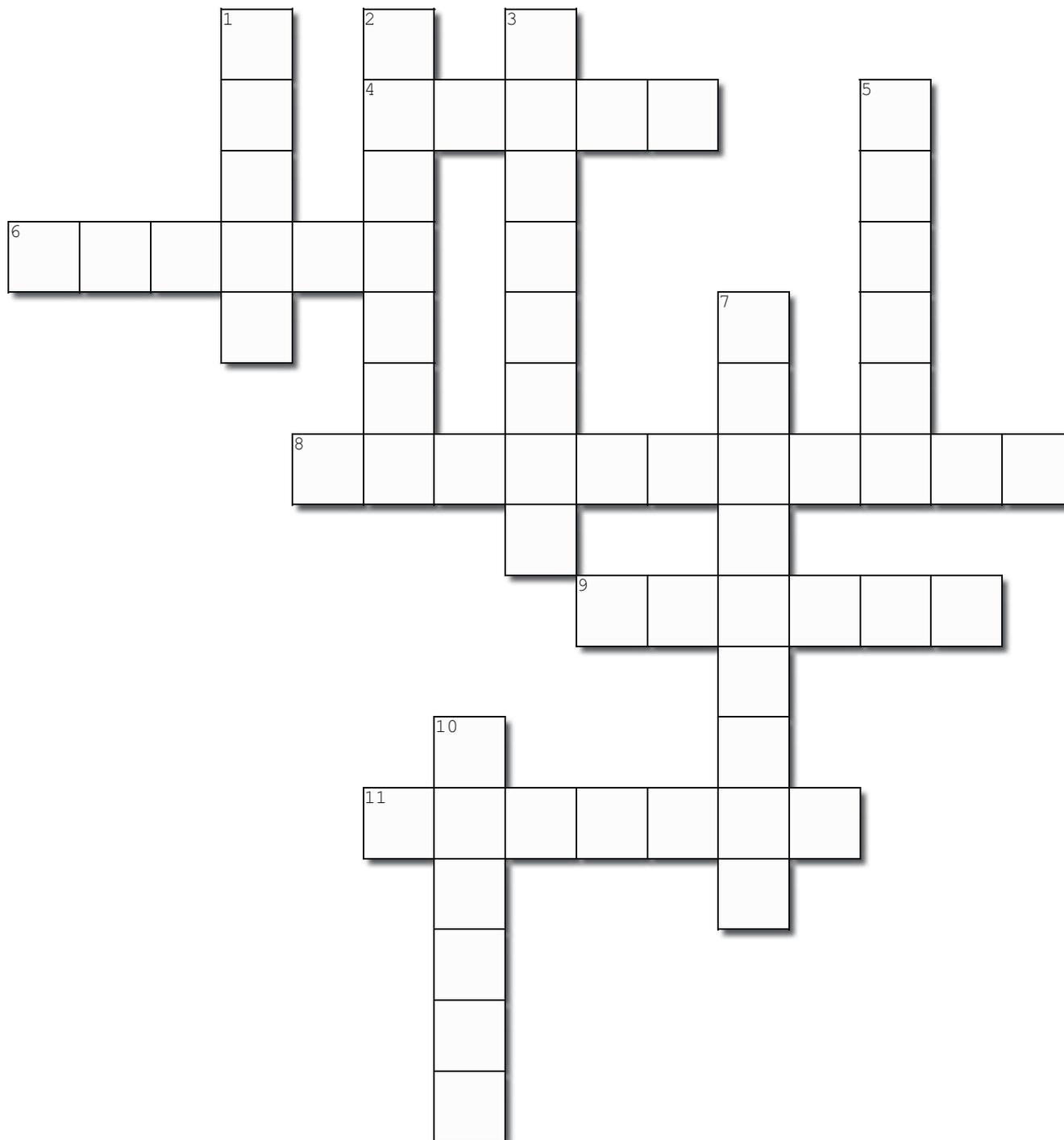
that the annual Holiday Artist Market will once again be back on-site at the Dennon Museum Center this year. "Our Holiday Artist Market is an annual fundraiser for the Dennon Museum Center," said Nicole Zeiler, Museum Store Manager. "Now in its 22nd year, the Market offers a lively shopping experience featuring fine art and handmade goods including pottery, jewelry, wood and metal work, fiber art, print, painting, mixed media and more by over 30 juried Michigan artists."

I hope you will take a moment to visit the store

website for more details about featured artists, including ceramics by Barbara Van Pelt, jewelry by Carol Murray, metalwork by Dick Davis, and fiber by Karin Fish. Over 30 artist biographies and more are available online at: shop.dennosmuseum.org. Whether you choose to shop the store online or visit us in-person to enjoy current exhibitions, explore the Discovery Gallery, or enjoy conversation with friendly staff and volunteers, please know that we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve our campus and community through this very special event.



November Fun Facts



Across

4. Which President renamed “National American Indian Heritage Month” to “Native American Heritage Month” in 1990?
6. November is _____ pudding lovers month.
8. Which chemical, which makes tree leaves green, decreases in the fall allowing other chemicals to become more prominent in the leaves?
9. Autumn became commonly used in the 18th century and came from the _____ word automne.
11. In Greek mythology, autumn began when which goddess mourned her daughter, Persephone, going to the underworld for winter?

Down

1. What is the birthstone for November?
2. Which butterflies fly south in the fall to the warmth of Mexico and parts of California?
3. _____ data shows that more people change their status from “single” to “in a relationship” or “engaged” in the fall.
5. A 2011 study found that _____% of US citizens over 100 years old were born in the autumn.
7. Meteorological autumn always begins on the first of _____.
10. November’s full Moon is traditionally called the _____ Moon.

Masks, Vaccines keep students in school

But TCAPS board pulls mask requirement for 2022



Achiel DePauw celebrates his 12th birthday by getting his first COVID-19 vaccine.

Kathryn DePauw
Editor in Chief

While the science and understanding of COVID-19 has

evolved, much of the public reaction to the global pandemic has not. More than a year and a half since American states and communities implemented measures to mitigate the spread of COVID, many still refuse to understand that masks are worn not just to protect the wearer, but also those around them. Wearing masks is the responsibility of more than just parents of medically fragile children. Public commentary at a Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) Board meeting on Oct. 25 put that grotesque misunderstanding on display.

I am one of those parents with a medically fragile child. My son, Achiel, 12, has a chronic health issue that complicates our response to COVID-19. He is at high-risk of COVID-19 complications and has had to rely on others around him to keep him safe. Last school year — before vaccines became available to those 12 and older — Achiel homeschooled through TCAPS's Virtual Live and Edgenuity programs. It was a very difficult year for all of us.

I am grateful for the support that the Traverse City community has shown for the youngest and most vulnerable among us. At the Oct. 25 board meeting, those in support of wearing masks in school made clear demands: require masks until the end of the semester — a logical request since parents must also commit to the schooling delivery method for a full semester — and establish metrics that can be used when revisiting the masking question in the future.

Those opposed to a mask requirement in TCAPS schools offered a scattershot of messages. Some opined, with questionable evidence, that masks don't work. Others mentioned cannibalism, satanism, fornication, resorted to lengthy diatribes about Critical Race Theory, and sprinkled in a healthy dose of Bible quotes. Some parents also seemed deeply concerned that masks harm children. Nevertheless, the vast majority of studies show that masks are highly effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Masking prevents illness and mental health issues

An ever expanding body of evidence shows that masks help limit the spread of the virus by reducing the amount of respiratory particles a person expels. This has been proven

true in laboratory settings, and in real-world studies where masks are touched, fussed with, and casually fitted. While the materials, and adherence to proper fitting impact the degree of safety, all masks worn over the nose and mouth offer some level of filtration and therefore protection.

Recent studies show that point:

A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study found that schools were four times more likely to experience an outbreak if they had no masking policy in place.

On Oct. 15, the University of Michigan published a study showing that the infection rate at schools with no masking policy was 61% higher than at schools requiring masks.

Data from early last month showed schools in Michigan without universal masking policies saw 186 outbreaks infecting 1,261 students and staff compared to 86 outbreaks infecting 490 at schools with mandates.

In addition to helping mitigate the spread of COVID-19, masking can also reduce the severity of the illness for those who do get it. More and more studies show that the initial virus load to which a person is exposed can influence how severely they get sick. A study published this summer in *Nature* showed a 10-fold reduction in viral load from only moderately effective masks. Universal masking is critically important considering peak viral load typically happens before symptoms are felt.

Several anti-maskers also alleged at the meeting that masks can cause psychological damage to our children. The reality is that children with chronic health conditions are twice as likely to develop mental health problems during adolescence. Public health measures that keep kids like my son, Achiel, in school with their friends and teachers, and also reduce the risk of this highly transmissible virus, are the best way to protect those at the highest risk for mental health problems.

Despite strong scientific consensus, the TCAPS school board has been reluctant to commit to long-term masking requirements. The lack of a long term mandate was the reason my family opted for remote schooling last year—we couldn't risk schools revoking the policy halfway through a semester. At the Oct. 25 meeting, a motion to let the mask requirement expire at the end of the year (three weeks before the end of the semester on Jan. 21) was approved by a vote of 5-1.

This timeline is intended to give families who wish to vaccinate the time to do so before the mask mandate ends on December 31. With the CDC recently granting approval for the Pfizer vaccine to be given to 5-11-year-olds, the opportunity will be available. However, in order to be fully vaccinated by the deadline, children will have to receive the first vaccination before Nov. 26.

With school not back in session until Jan. 3, the first shot could happen a few days after that but many families, especially those who aren't sure and may want to speak with their pediatrician, may not get that chance before that date. How quickly doctors can get access to the vaccines will also determine how much smaller that timeframe is for families.

The TCAPS board also discussed other factors that would cause them to revisit the issue. If school attendance falls below 88% (it only fell to approximately 93% last year, and attendance of 96% was the pre-COVID rate), or the regional number of COVID-19 cases increases significantly, they may consider requiring masks again.

My son just turned 12, and celebrated his Nov. 2 birthday by getting his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine at Grand Traverse Children's Clinic. Achiel is very excited to feel a little safer, but I can't help but think about other families in our community. Families with children with suppressed immune systems, who either cannot take the vaccine or who could have reduced vaccine effectiveness.

If TCAPS' masking policy disappears at the end of this year, community protection will center almost exclusively around vaccination. Although younger children will have access to vaccines, no one knows how many parents will jump in line.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, the number of parents saying they will get their children vaccinated "right away" has declined over the past month. This is likely due to the number of COVID-19 cases decreasing around the country and reducing the perception of urgency. However, with a five-week timeline to full vaccination, there is little time to waste for parents who want full protection for the holiday season—or the removal of the TCAPS mask mandate.

As the body of evidence in support of masks and vaccines continues to grow, and we slowly creep out of the pandemic, TCAPS families are still left with many questions. At the moment, no set number of school cases, positivity rates, or hospitalization levels will automatically trigger, or resume, a universal school masking policy. While trying to remain flexible in an ever-changing situation, the school board has left TCAPS families in a state of continual uncertainty.

The world recently reached the grim milestone of 5 million deaths from COVID-19, with the largest contributor being the United States with approximately 750,000 deaths. With the possibility of vaccine-resistant strains, it might be wise to establish masking standards now in order to protect the health of our children and preserve their access to in-person education.



Photos by Kathryn DePauw

Parents gather outside the Oct. 25 TCAPS board meeting to show their support for the district's universal masking policy.